



## **Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia**

**N**OT LONG AGO, I took my dog, Bingo, to the vet. He was having trouble walking and the vet advised me that he almost certainly had a terminal cancer. It was a sad moment and I went home to tell the family that a faithful friend – with a much nicer nature than any human being we had ever met – was dying and that we should probably have to have him ‘put down’ within a week or two. We looked on the internet, as you do, and discovered that the reason for putting him down would be that the pain would become such that it would be unfair to keep him alive beyond a certain point. Uncertain of my theology, I lit a candle for him at Walsingham – well, for all of us, really – and two months later he is still wagging his tail, eating everything in sight, comfortable and pain-free and up for the walks that he can no longer manage. How long this will continue, we’re not sure and Bingo ‘may be history’ before you read this.

If animals, why not people? A week or two ago I went to see someone who was a very close friend. For some ten years now, he has had no memory. He can’t remember what he did for a living, what his wife was called when she was alive, or any of the many other things that make up our memories. I told him about the books he had written: he said he would like a copy, but several were at his bedside. I read him his biography in front of one of the books and he was surprised by all of it. It costs as much as most of us earn to keep him clean, comfortable and fed. Surely his time has come ... . Then there are the heart-rending stories of people with the kind of pain that drugs can’t treat. Surely, rather than dying in agony, they ought to be helped to die – assisted suicide (making available a lethal dose) or euthanasia (administering a lethal dose) ought to be made legal. So runs the debate. The last time it was tried – Lord Joffe’s bill in the House of Lords – the legal campaign to permit assisted suicide did not succeed. But now, we read, as the secularists and the secular press get going again with their campaign to change the law, most of the general public approves of assisted suicide.

The Church does not. Life is a gift from God. Sometimes it begins and ends painfully and we are enabled by other gifts of God – medicine, science – to help make things less painful, less difficult, and that includes difficult medical decisions about not resuscitating or keeping breathing and feeding machines on that are clearly not ever going to make the patient better. What we have no authority or right to do - and this is what the Bible and the Church have consistently taught – is to decide when life itself begins and ends. Ending people’s lives because life has become too difficult for them will very easily become ending people’s lives because their life has become too difficult for us. No more expensive nursing homes, no geriatric wards, none of that waiting until we can get our hands on the family inheritance ... . Let’s not go there. We’re already in a mess about birth – abortion and spare embryos – let’s not get into a mess about death as well.

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